

## Not as Strange as Expected by MobMotherScitah

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**Summary:** Eleven's life takes a pleasant turn when she stumbles into Benny Hammond's Diner. She finds the father she always wanted. He finds the daughter he always wanted. Nothing too strange happens as they live relatively normal lives. Short and sweet. T for mild language.

## Not as Strange as Expected

*Saw this post on Tumblr and it was this little prompt about a loving normal life for Eleven with Benny Hammond as her father. So, I wrote.*

*It's kinda a shitty story. Rushed feeling. But I wanted it to be shorter. So, here it is!*

*I tried to wrap it up like a movie would. Yanno? Keeping in style with it.*

*I don't know that it works. But hey, feels?*

*~ Scitah*

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Benny Hammond was by no means a master chef with culinary prowess. He was not rich or even moderately wealthy, nor was he bitter to that fact. He was where he wanted to be, for the most part. Raised by his father who liked to sleep around and cause a fuss all over town, Benny found himself pitied most of his childhood.

"Oh, there goes poor little Benny!"

"Shame his mother died."

"I thought she just dropped him off with his father and left?"

"Might as well be dead, then! Who leaves their flesh and blood on a doorstep like Carl Hammond's?"

"He really should have a mother figure in his life..."

"You wanna be his mother? Tethered to Carl the rest of your life?"

"Mercy no!"

Old birds chirp loudest, he guessed. Being raised by a womanizer, people figured he'd be one just like his daddy. But Ben had no predilection for sex or the supple curves of a woman. Nor men. He honestly felt no sexual desire for anyone. Sure, he could appreciate the aesthetic of a fit body in nice or flashy clothes... But that was as

far as it ever seemed to go. Only one who seemed to care was his ex fiancé.

She made him aware of her attraction to him and he rolled with it, assuming that's what he was supposed to do. He stuck it out, bought her gifts, took her out. She called him an absolute gentleman. Made him think it was going to work out with how much she gushed about his lack of handsiness. "My patient man." she called him. So, he went the whole mile. Bought her a ring, got down on one knee, popped the question. She said yes.

After that it went downhill. He remained himself, keeping his hands off of her but still giving her gifts and taking her out. One night, she tried surprising him with... Well, with herself. A vision in nylon and lace. Seductive. But Benny was not seduced. He tried to be. Lord knows he tried.

She asked if she wasn't good enough. Wasn't pretty enough. He told her that she was gorgeous. That it wasn't that something was wrong with her, but with him. So, she asked if he was Queer. He admitted he was not. Confused, hurt, and angry, she redressed, packed her things, and gave back the ring calling him a freak. Never saw her again.

People asked and pried and offered condolences. Some demonized her for her actions, but he would change the subject. If she couldn't understand, how could they? It took a while for people to find something else to talk about.

By this time, he had his diner and found himself in love. Finally. Not with a person, but with the prospect of feeding people. He figured he was pretty alright at a good burger and basket of fries. Maybe a steak here and there, or chicken strips. A shake. Locals definitely liked his food, so, it was all right in his world. Weekends saw teens and families, weekdays were the repeat customers, Wednesdays cops tended to show up for lunch. Routine and calm. Just the way Benny liked it!

He fished, he hunted, he camped. Often with a few of the older regulars. They liked him best, having known his father and marveled at how Benny had turned out. It always astounded them. In a way,

they were proud. Nothing made him happier than to make people speak so kindly of him.

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Eleven couldn't believe how long she had run. Her legs were tired, her side hurt, and her lungs burned as she stepped with groggy feet towards the diner on the edge of the nearby town. She'd never seen anything like it and already knew there were people inside. Buildings always meant there were people inside. Dead or alive.

The strange and tall clean looking building was a sharp contrast to the somewhat dirty and lived in stubby diner. There wasn't even a fence around it! No guards. No matching cars. It was so... Different. Maybe the people inside would be different, too? Like that one time there was a new technician!

He'd been nice at first. He smiled kindly, asked how she was once. Said he had a little sister. Eleven thought he was actually kind of pretty. But Papa must not have liked him because he frowned. Next day, no new technician. Sometimes, she wondered where he went... She had asked once. Papa told her that he was moved to a different department.

Regardless, she would need to be careful. Because these new people could be just like the others. They could throw her into a small space, or make her do things that she didn't want to do anymore. No more monsters. No more finding. No more hurting. She had made sure of that.

Sneaking in after a man had thrown out a bag. She heard the sound of people talking. Men. Old sounding. If she leaned just right, she could see them and the man who she snuck in behind. They were smiling. How strange.

Finding a door, she quietly made her way through and saw a strange room with a smell that made her stomach clench. Hunger nearly ruined her sneaking, but she looked over. The men were still talking and laughing and smiling. Finding a tiny red basket with paper lining it made her stomach growl. Little golden sticks. Food?

Picking one up and biting into it, it was indeed food. Stealth gone,

Eleven ate wildly. Delicious, salty, warm, comforting food. A shout drew her to look up at the man who had stepped out of the building when she saw it. He was mostly shocked. But there was anger in his expression. Anger meant the room.

Grabbing the little red basket, Eleven ran for the back door. She was so close. So. Close! But then large hands grabbed her shoulders and turned her around. He asked something, but, she was too afraid to understand. She didn't want to go into a room. Didn't want to be punished.

The anger on the man's face seemed to melt away. He was more... Confused. Alarmed. He wasn't going to punish her, maybe? He released her shoulders and looked at the dropped basket. When had she dropped it? A small sigh escaped him and he scratched at his head. "Come on." he states.

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Benny watched this little girl scarf the burger he had returned to her. Questions filled his mind and he wondered if he should call Social Services? They might just return her to the people who she clearly ran from. Broke his heart.

"Can I call you... Ellie?" he asked, scratching at his chin. Eleven nodded. "Do you like... Dresses?"

"Dresses?"

"You know? Like..." he motioned towards her. "Like that but... Pretty." Her eyes lit up, lifting from looking at the hospital gown she wore.

"I like pretty."

A soft smile crossed his features. "Me too, kid."

He sat her in his living room later, after giving her ice cream and gave her a pillow and blanket. When she laid down, he covered her with the blanket and tucked her in. Reaching out, he ran a hand over her buzzed head and offered a small smile to her. "You're going to be okay, Ellie. I'm going to take care of you."

Ellie nodded, watching him.

"I'm gonna head out to town and see if I can't get you some pretty dresses and things. Alright? It's safe here, so, sleep easy." Another nod as he stood up. "I'll be right back."

"Okay."

He turned right around and left, heading to his truck. Getting in, he thought a moment. How was he going to explain Ellie? Shaking his head, Benny wasn't too sure, but, the kid needed clothes! And... Other things.

Starting the car, he head out to the nearest clothing store and entered. He entered the section for little girls and looked around. A hand on his arm startled him into looking towards Lily Mayers. The woman who ran the store. "Christ, Lily."

She chuckled. "What's going on, Benny?"

Rubbing at his face, he shook his head. "Guess I've got a kid."

Lily laughed as if he were joking, but when he raised his brows at her, she stopped. "You're serious?"

"I am."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Lily lit up like a tree. "What's this kid like? Where are they?"

"Ellie is... Back home. It's... Complicated." he frowned. "She was... Dropped off by her mom in a God damn hospital gown with her hair all shaved off. Starved and dirty. She's got... No clothes or things and... I gotta get some clothes for this kid."

"What the hell happened to her?"

"I dunno. I asked, but... All she said was 'bad'."

Sympathy crossed Lily's face. "Oh, poor dear." She looked towards the clothes they were standing before. "What's her size?" Benny raised both brows and shook his head, drawing Lily to look towards him.

"Ah..." He lifted his hand to show Ellie's height. "This high, thin as a twig. Says she likes pretty."

Lily giggled at Benny before nodding. "I can work with that." She pulled Benny around the section and snagged a bunch of clothing, layering it into his arms. When she began ringing him up, she would ignore the socks and tights and undergarments. He gave her a heavily thankful look, which she grinned at. "Maybe bring her by some time?"

"Why don't you come by some time and I'll give you a free meal or two as payment." he offers.

"Sounds good!" nods Lily. "Stay safe now."

"You too!" He left with several bags and returned to his home. Entering his home, he quietly approached Ellie's sleeping form and set the bags down just as quietly. He smiled gently down at her sleeping form and stood there a moment. In truth, he had always wanted a kid.

Adoption was an option he had considered a lot. But he never felt like he could provide a financially stable enough life for a kid. And what would they learn from him? How to be abnormal? How to not find love? Well, that last one wasn't really true, now, was it?

No, he'd encourage her to find happiness no matter what. Give her the support and encouragement he never got. That was that.

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Eleven woke up- No. No. Ellie woke up. Her name was Ellie. She woke up and looked at the bags on the floor around the front of the couch. Sitting up, she eyed them curiously. When she touched one, it made a noise. Crinkly. Strange.

"Oh, hey kid." Benny called, stepping out from his room. "In there are a whole bunch of clothes. I already took my shower, so, go ahead and take your own. There's a clean towel on the rack and a clean toothbrush that's blue in the cup on the sink. Gotta keep clean teeth, right?"

Ellie blinked a long moment. "I don't understand."

Benny stood there a moment before moving over. Picking up her pillow, he tossed to her other side and sat down. "Why don't we look through your new clothes and see what you want to wear first? Alright?"

"Alright." she nods.

The way her face lights up as he shows her all the clothes Lily picked out melts his damn heart. Just the sheer joy in her grin. Makes him wonder just who could mistreat a kid? There is a purple dress he himself likes and he finds it touching that she chooses that one to wear. They then go over underwear and stockings and the three shoes; white sandals, polished black dress shoes, and a pair of pink sneakers. He hopes they'll fit. All he did was eyeball them.

Once the outfit was picked out, he showed her to the bathroom, again, having done so last night... And shows her the toothbrush he mentioned. She knows how to use it, thankfully. Next, he shows her how to use the shower. Shows her the soaps to use. Once both of them are sure she understands, he tells her that if she needs any help that he'll be in the living room.

Ellie watches him leave the small bathroom before tugging off the gown. Her eyes dart to the purple dress and she smiles. Her small fingers reach out and mess with the collar a moment before she remembers the dirt. Hopping into the shower, she washes herself clean. Once done, she dries off, folds the towel back to how it was and hangs it back up, hoping he'll be pleased and give her more ice cream.

Pulling on her underwear and dress was easy. Tights, on the other hand, were not. She glared at the white tights with little yellow flowers on them and decided she would ask for his help after she brushed her teeth.

Stepping out of the bathroom, clean and in something pretty, she looked towards Benny who grinned towards her. "Well look at you!" He says with a very warm smile that spurs a smile of her own. "You are very pretty, kid." Ellie felt her face go warm and giggled lightly.



She fidgeted with the tights in her hands. "Tights givin' you trouble?" She nodded, causing him to inhale. "Well... I've never worn tights myself, but I'm sure we can figure it out." She walked over and handed him the tights. He unraveled them and blinked. "Can't be harder to put on than pants..."

It took a few minutes for him to finally get them. He remained patiently befuddled, but eventually got them over her knees. His eyes darted away as he tugged them further up. Secured on her, they were a bit stifling, but Ellie liked them. She floofed out her skirt and grinned.

"Pretty as a princess, Ellie." He states, grinning widely towards her. He then reached into a back pocket and pulled out a white cloth. Unfolding it revealed a large square. "Here. For your head." He folded it diagonally and carefully tied it over her head. Pressing her hands to the cloth, she grinned at him. "Now let's pick out some shoes."

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Benny got Ellie tested and enrolled. Once more, he was the talk of the town. Not something he relished, especially since people were not only talking about him, but Ellie too! Especially since she had to catch up in her education. But she proved eager to learn and susceptible to kindness.

Sometimes, she had breakdowns, though, when a teacher became particularly disappointed. Those times broke Benny's heart. She was a crying mess and the only thing he knew to do was to just hug her. It was pretty damn effective at comforting her, though.

Luckily, her arrival was a hotly spread topic that had more people coming in to see her for themselves. More people, more customers. More customers, more money. He hiked the prices up by 30 cents. That was all it took to create a better cushion of money. Money he rather enjoyed spending on Ellie. He saved up and built an extension on his small house. A new room, just for Ellie. One he let her help design and decorate.

The first year passed really fast for both of them. And damn, did she learn fast. It was like she craved to know all the things she was never taught. By the end of the school year, she was tested again and if she

took summer lessons, she would be caught up enough to follow along with the other kids her age.

Dark blonde hair grew on her head. Could be brown. She said brown, he said dark blonde. Civil unrest. Still, he didn't care about the color of her hair, so long as she was happy. When she wasn't at school or doing homework, she was gladly helping Benny out. His little Princess Waitress.

When he went fishing or camping, she came along and learned to do the things he did. He taught her how to make a burger or a shake or the odd salad here and there. Taught her about making a check for patrons and counting money. Balancing expenses and revenue... Paying bills.

He couldn't help but teach her everything she asked to learn. "Can I help? I want to help. I can help." It was constant and he admired her tenacity. Made sure to tell her so, too.

The patrons ate it up. They adored little Ellie. Tips were a lot larger with her grinning at everyone. A group of boys tended to ride out for weekend lunch just so they could chat with Ellie. Well, one rather avidly spoke to Ellie. The others tended to mock him for it.

Benny started to feel protective over Ellie. But, he decided that she was more than capable of making her own damn choices. Besides, she liked that group. Thought they were fun or something. If she was happy, Benny was happy.

They decided her birthday was in Spring, when flowers bloomed and bunnies hopped around. Another year rolled past and Benny could expertly braid the long hair of Ellie. He even figured out how to French braid her hair and fishtail the end.

He let her paint his nails various pinks and reds and peaches. Every time she did it, she got better at it. She decided that she wanted a gold wall and he just couldn't say no. They went and got gold paint and painted the living room wall gold. She specifically used a porous sponge and dabbed it in circular motions. Doing as she did, he didn't question it. When they finished, the sun set and both were immeasurably pleased with how the wall seemed to react to the light.

"You're pretty good at this, Ellie."

She grinned up at him. "Thank you! Will was talking to me about art the other day."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. He showed me some of the pictures he drew and of how he wants to get into painting." she shrugged lightly.

"Alright, go and take a shower. I'll work on dinner." he tells her.

"Okay daddy." she chirps before hopping up from the couch and rushing off to the bathroom.

Benny sat there a long moment, letting it sink in that she called him daddy. A large grin grew across his face and warmth filled his chest. Setting a hand over his heart, he chuckles. The best title he had ever received. For sure.

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Ellie was sitting in the school hallway, waiting for her father to come and pick her up. Two of the boys in school were bullying Mike Dustin Lucas and Will and she was going to have none of it. She had thrown both larger and older boys across the playground. Knocked the larger of the two out while the smaller screamed bloody murder.

"Ellie!" her father's voice calls out, making her look up towards him. He breaks into a run and looks at her bloody nose. "What happened, Princess?"

"I... I got angry." She whispers.

The Principal opens their door and looks towards Benny. "A word, please." For a moment, Benny stares up at the Principal before he finally stands and follows them in. Moments later has Benny exiting and shaking his head.

Looking up at him, Ellie doesn't see anger or disappointment. She rarely does. Rather, he is confused. "Daddy?"

He snaps his eyes to hers. "Come on, kid. Let's go home."

"Am I in trouble?"

He breathes out a sort of laugh. "I... Don't know. I mean, you'll be suspended for two days... For fighting. We'll talk about it back home, alright?"

"Okay." she nods and follows him out of her school. They get into his truck and head home, finding four bikes with corresponding boys atop them. "Do you think they're mad?"

Benny looks towards her in surprise. "Well... Why don't we find out?"

She nods and the two get out of the truck. "That. Was. Awesome!" Dustin cries as he and the others rush over to Ellie.

"You are a certified bad ass." agrees Lucas.

"Alright, alright." Benny laughs. "Do your parents know you guys are over here?"

"Well, not here, specifically." Mike shrugs.

"So, you guys aren't mad at me?" Ellie asks quietly.

"Mad at you?" laughs Will. "That was really cool!"

"You're like a superhero!" Dustin exclaims.

"Alright you five. In the house." chuckles Benny. "I gotta hear this." The kids abandon their bikes and follow Ellie and Benny into their home. They pile into the living room and spot the gold wall.

"Whoa. You did it." Will murmurs.

"Do you like it?" asks Ellie, looking at the wall with the others.

"That's really cool." nods Mike.

"My parents would never let me paint the wall in the living room." Dustin scoffs.

"Living room?" Sniffs Lucas. "I can't even paint my own room!"

"Mr. Hammond?" Mike says seriously, looking towards Benny. "You are officially the best dad."

Benny laughs. "Thanks kid." he then sits in his chair and looks to Ellie. "So. You all gonna tell me what happened?" All five start talking and he holds up a hand to stop them. "Whoa, whoa, whoa. One order at a time, kids."

"Troy and James were bullying us again." begins Mike, earning nods.

"They always pick on us." adds Lucas.

"They pushed Dustin and then El comes up and tells them to leave us alone. They start making fun of her, calling her a motherless freak. She just glares at them and they both go flying across the playground! It was amazing!"

"Knocked James right the hell out!" Dustin says with a large grin.

"So..." Benny begins, turning his attention to Ellie. "you never actually touched those boys?"

"No." she answers, shaking her head.

"But they're saying you hit them."

"She never touched them." says Will.

"Then how did one get a concussion and the other get a broken arm?" presses Benny, looking at all five children.

"Ellie can do some weird shit with her mind, man." Lucas responds.

"Easy on the language, kids." chuckles Benny. His laughter vanishes when the decorative bowl in the middle of the coffee table levitates. He had let her pick it out. Ellie floated it right into his lap and he just sat there blinking at it. "Okay." he finally says. "So... You can do stuff like those wizards in that space movie."

"I think you're talking about Jedi in Star Wars." corrects Lucas.

"Yeah. Think about it. Wizards in space." nods Benny, making the

four boys seem to think a moment. His attention returns to his daughter. "How did you get a bloody nose?"

"Sometimes, when I... Do things like that, my nose bleeds." she admits.

"Well..." He leans forwards and sets the bowl back onto the table. "Try not to use it in front of a lot of people who will run their mouths. Alright? And don't use it to fight. I would rather you use your fists if you're gonna fight. Let's not be unfair, here."

"I don't know how to fight with my fists." she mutters, shrugging.

"It's real easy, Princess." He lifts his left fist and points to his thumb, "Never tuck in your thumb, or you'll break it." then to his elbow. "Never lock your elbow." Then back to his fist. "Start vertical and strike horizontal. A twist. Put your weight into it and face someone at a slight angle."

"Are there... classes on fighting?" Ellie asks.

"Ah, not in school." he chuckles.

"I want to learn how to fight." she says strongly.

"Alright." he raises his hands in surrender. "We'll figure something out, Princess."

"So cool." Dustin whispers.

"Seriously, best dad." affirms Mike with a nod.

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Benny had signed Ellie up for the local Karate class and supported her in this new endeavor. She seemed to really enjoy it, actually, and that made him happy. Lucas joined her, actually. Something that made her quite happy, doing this with a friend.

She still adored pretty dresses and the braids he would give her. She would still help out with the Diner when she had the time. He even bought her a her own apron and order book to take orders on.

More time ticked on, another year, then another, and another, rolling right into Middle School and then out of it. High School came around and Mike finally asked Ellie if she would like to date. She agreed quite emphatically. She'd been playing Dungeons and Dragons with them for some time.

If her enthusiasm was anything to go by, she knew the rules back and forth and was making her own 'serious' campaign. He thought it was sweet. Even though it meant she spent more time away from him. So long as she was happy. Par the course.

When she turned 14, he began paying her with money for the time she worked in the Diner. A sort of incentive to keep her nearer. She kept the tips, he paid her \$5 an hour. A good start for her. She never worked over three hours on weekdays that didn't have Karate. She didn't work at all when she had Karate. Her weekends were split. Sundays were D&D and hanging with the guys, Saturdays were work. He figured she balanced her life a hell of a lot better than anyone else did!

What nightmares she used to have no longer plagued the teen. Where she came from was long forgotten or pushed aside. Her ideas of Pretty expanded as her confidence did. If she ever had another problem with those two boys who bullied her and her friends, she never mentioned it.

Things were quite well. He was happy, she was happy, they were both happy. As individuals and a family. All was well and good.

Her grades struggled very slightly her sophomore year, but that was because the teacher was hard. Not only for Ellie, but most students. But that passed, too.

She remained quite steady with Mike Wheeler all the way through High School. Hell! The two went to Prom together! Benny nearly cried as he and the other parents watched the kids head off together, all dressed up. Shit! Joyce Byers elder son even showed up for Will!

Kid was some magazine photographer out in New York. Everyone was adamant that he was practically famous. He would laugh and say that he really wasn't. Practically blushed! But Benny could see. To

this small town in Indiana, he was practically famous, but in New York? He was no one. That's how it works in big cities. Especially cities like New York!

Nancy Harrington had some sort of thing with Jonathan Byers. There was something between them, he was sure. But Nancy was married to her High School sweetheart, Steve. The most lax couple he had ever seen! Hell, when Steve showed up to take Nancy to some fancy dinner out of town, he and Jonathan seemed to have something between them. It was odd. It also wasn't Benny's business or place to judge. If they were all fuckin' around, good for them!

God, when he attended Ellie's graduation... It just couldn't be helped. Benny cried. His little girl was grown up. They'd been talking about colleges and each talk had him a whole flurry of raw emotions! Pride, anguish, loss, love, happiness, sadness. The whole shebang! She was gonna head off to college and be further away from him... But it was a good thing.

That's what he told himself. This is a good thing. She'll be happy and flourishing. She'll make new friends and do well in class. She will make me proud, like she always has. It helped most of the time.

But seeing her in that cap and gown... It all solidified and the waterworks flipped on. Joyce handed him a tissue from her pack while Karen patted his back. Lord knows he was just gonna die when she left for college...

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Will Byers chased a dream of Art and ended up in Advertising, moving to New York with his brother. Lucas Sinclair became a cop and then a Detective in Indianapolis. Dustin Henderson didn't necessarily major in anything, but fell into acting. He moved out to Las Angeles. Mike Wheeler started college with a major in creative writing, but ended up in the growing video game industry. Ellie went in for business, found a passion for counseling.

The relationship between Ellie and Mike was fairly returned to friendship to allow freedom during their college years. Mike got a stable job with a burgeoning game company working out of Chicago. Ellie sought counseling jobs in Chicago and got a few interviews. She



didn't tell Mike she was in the city until she got one of the jobs. Then she surprised him with the information, spurring him to request she move in with him.

She did and a few months later, he proposed. The two returned home to their parents to tell them the news and once more, Benny cried. Again, it just couldn't be helped. He congratulated the couple and hugged them both tightly.

Benny offered to cater it, but Ellie rejected the idea. She didn't want him working on her big day. He relented at that.

When the wedding rolled around, they held it at home, drawing everyone back from the reaches traveled. It was like a reunion. Benny adored that Ellie vastly enjoyed the return of her friends. She was the embodiment of happiness and his whole being warmed.

The vague thought of where she'd be if he had called Social Services echoed in the bottom of a beer before promptly being ignored when he was asked to dance with his happy daughter. "Love you, Ellie."

"Love you too, Daddy."